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The Strongest Argument Against Mark 16:9-20

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**HOW CAN
A PERSON
KNOW WHICH
GOD EXISTS?**



The Strongest Argument Against Mark 16:9-20

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

THE authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 has been the focus of much analysis and discussion over the years among textual critics and Bible scholars. While the academic interest of settling a fine point of textual criticism has been much belabored, it is important to recognize that the verses contain no teaching of significance that is not taught elsewhere. Christ's post-resurrection appearance to Mary is verified elsewhere (Luke 8:2; John 20:1-18), as is His appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:35), and His appearance to the eleven apostles (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23). The "Great Commission" is presented by two of the other three Gospel writers (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48), with both belief and baptism elsewhere pinpointed as prerequisites to salvation (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; 22:16; et al.). Luke verifies the ascension twice (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). The promise of the signs that were to accompany the apostles' activities is hinted at by Matthew (28:20), noted by the Hebrews writer (2:3-4), explained in greater detail by John (chapters 14-16; cf. 14:12), and demonstrated by the events of the book of Acts (see McGarvey, 1875, pp. 377-378). So, in one sense, the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 as it relates to knowing, with certainty, God's will for our

lives is superfluous. [NOTE: For a fuller discussion of the genuineness of Mark 16:9-20, see Miller, 2005.]

In ascertaining the genuineness of a textual variant, several factors are taken into consideration. The external evidence of age and geographical diversity of Greek manuscripts, ancient versions, and patristic citations are examined. Internal evidence is also weighed, taking into account transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities. The latter criterion centers on the style and vocabulary of the author in the book, as well as the usage of the author elsewhere and in the gospel accounts (cf. Metzger, 1978, pp. 209ff.).

NON-MARKAN STYLE?

THE most persuasive piece of evidence that prompts some textual scholars to discount Mark 16:9-20 as genuine is the internal evidence. Though the Alands conceded that the "longer Marcan ending" actually "reads an absolutely convincing text" (1987, p. 287), in fact, **the internal evidence** weighs more heavily than the external evidence in the minds of many of those who support omission of the verses. Observe carefully the following definitive pronouncement of this viewpoint—a pronouncement that simultaneously concedes the strength of the **external** evidence in favor of the verses:

On the other hand, the section is no casual or unauthorised [*sic*] addition to the Gospel. **From the second century onwards, in nearly all manuscripts, versions, and other authorities**, it forms an integral part of the Gospel, and it can be shown to have existed, if not in the apostolic, at least in the sub-apostolic age. A certain amount of evidence against it there is (though very little can be shown to be independent of Eusebius the Church historian, 265-340 A.D.), but certainly **not enough to justify its rejection, were it not that internal evidence clearly demonstrates that it cannot have proceeded from the hand of St. Mark** (Dummelow, 1927, p. 73, emp. added).

Listen also to an otherwise conservative scholar express the same sentiment: "If these deductions are correct the mass of MSS [manuscripts—DM] containing the longer ending must have been due to the acceptance of this ending as **the most preferable**. But **internal evidence combines with textual evidence to raise suspicions** regarding this ending" (Guthrie, 1970, p. 77, emp. added). Alford took the same position: "The **internal** evidence...will be found to preponderate vastly against the authorship of Mark" (1844, 1:434, emp. added). Even Bruce Metzger admitted: "The long ending, **though present in a variety of witnesses, some of them ancient**, must also be judged by **internal evidence** to be secondary" (p. 227, emp. added).

So, in the minds of not a few scholars, if it were not for the **internal** evidence, the external evidence would be sufficient to establish the genuineness of the verses. What precisely, pray tell, is this internal evidence that is so powerful and weighs so heavily on the issue as to prod scholars to "jump through hoops" in an effort to discredit the verses? What formidable data exists that could possibly prompt

so many to discount all evidence to the contrary?

Scholars direct attention to “the presence of 17 non-Marcian words or words used in a non-Marcian sense” (Metzger, p. 227). Alford made the same allegation over a century earlier: “No less than seventeen words and phrases occur in it (and some of them several times) which are never elsewhere used by Mark—whose adherence to his own peculiar phrases is remarkable” (p. 438). The reader is urged to observe carefully the implicit assumption of those who reject verses 9-20 on such a basis: If the last 12 verses of a document employ words and expressions (whether one or 17?) that are not employed by the writer previously in the same document, then the last 12 verses of the document are not the product of the original writer. Is this line of thinking valid?

Over a century ago, in 1869, John A. Broadus provided a masterful evaluation (and decisive defeat) of this very contention (pp. 355-362). Using the Greek text that was available at the time produced by Tregelles, Broadus examined the 12 verses that **precede** Mark 16:9-20 (i.e., 15:44-16:8)—verses whose genuineness are above reproach—and applied precisely the same test to them. Incredibly, he found in the 12 verses preceding 16:9-20 **exactly** the same number of words and phrases (17) **that are not used previously by Mark!** The words and their citations are as follows: *tethneiken* (15:44), *gnous apo, edoreisato, ptoma* (15:45), *eneileisen, lelatomeimenon, petpas, prosekulisen* (15:46), *diagenomenou, aromata* (16:1), *tei mia ton sabbaton* (16:2), *apokulisei* (16:3), *anakekulistai, sphodra* (16:4), *en tois dexiois* (16:5), *eichen* (in a peculiar sense), and *tromos* (16:8). The reader is surely stunned and appalled that textual critics would wave aside verses of Scripture

as **counterfeit and fraudulent** on such fragile, flimsy grounds.

Writing a few years later, J.W. McGarvey applied a similar test to the last 12 verses of Luke, again, verses whose genuineness, like those preceding Mark 16:9-20, are above suspicion (1875, pp. 377-382). He found **nine words that are not used by Luke elsewhere in his book**—four of which are not found anywhere else in the New Testament! Yet, once again, no textual critic or New Testament Greek manuscript scholar has questioned the genuineness of the last 12 verses of Luke. Indeed, the methodology that seeks to determine the genuineness of a text on the basis of new or unusual word use is a concocted, artificial, unscholarly, nonsensical, pretentious—and clearly discredited—criterion.

CONCLUSION

FOR the unbiased observer, this matter is settled: the strongest piece of internal evidence mustered against the genuineness of Mark 16:9-20 is **no evidence at all**. Consequently, the reader of the New Testament may possess far more confidence that these

verses are original than is typically given by current textual critics.

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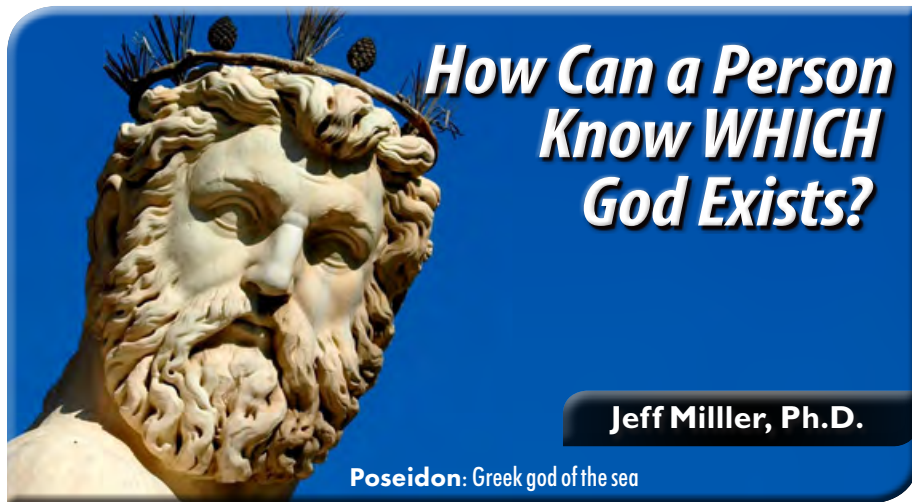
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SEVERAL decades ago, the United States was overwhelmingly Christian in its religious persuasion. When naturalism and Darwinian evolution picked up speed in the U.S. and challenged the biblical story of man's origins—the perspective most held by Americans—apologists sprang up in response, dealing a death blow to the naturalistic religion in the minds of many. Once evolutionary theory had been dealt with, both biblically and scientifically, it was natural for many Americans to recognize that they had always been right—Christianity is the true religion.

Sadly, under the banner of “tolerance,” the “politically correct” police have made significant inroads in compelling the American public, not only to tolerate, but to endorse and encourage pluralism and the proliferation of false religion in America. What was once an understood conclusion—that if evolution is wrong, then biblical Creation must be true—is now heavily challenged in America.

It has become a popular tactic among atheistic scoffers to mock Bible believers by sarcastically arguing that there's just as much evidence for the Flying Spaghetti Monster as there

is for any god. Therefore, if intelligent design doctrine deserves time in the classroom, so does the doctrine of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster—the Pastafarians (cf. Langton, 2005; Butt, 2010, p. 12). At the University of South Carolina, a student organization made up of Pastafarians was responsible for sponsoring the debate held between A.P.'s Kyle Butt and popular atheist, Dan Barker (Butt, 2010).

One such scoffer approached me awhile back after one of the sessions of my evolution seminar—a biology professor from the local



Nisroch: Assyrian god of agriculture

university in the city where I was speaking. His quibble was a fair one: “Even if you're right that naturalistic evolution/atheism is false, you still haven't proven **which** God exists. You haven't proven it's the God of the Bible. Why couldn't it

be Allah? Or [sarcastically] the Flying Spaghetti Monster?”

It is true that many times when apologists discredit naturalism and show that the evidence points to supernaturalism, they do not necessarily always take the next step and answer how we arrive specifically at the God of the Bible as the one true God. Perhaps the main reason, again, is because the answer was once so obvious that the additional step did not need to be taken. People already had faith in the Bible, and they only needed someone to



Jupiter: Roman god of light and sky, and protector of the state and its laws

answer an attack on its integrity. Upon answering it, they went back to their faith in Christianity comfortably. But as naturalism and pluralism have eroded the next generation, and Bible teaching—the impetus for developing faith (Romans 10:17)—has declined, Christianity is no longer a given.

Many in Christendom would respond to the professor's questions by saying, “You just have to have faith. You just have to take a leap and accept the God of the Bible. You don't have to have tangible evidence.” That reaction, of course, is exactly how scoffers want you to answer. Their response: “Aha! You don't have proof that God exists. So why should I believe in Him? I might

as well pick one that suits me better or make up my own god to serve.”

The Bible simply does not teach that one should accept God without evidence. We should test or prove all things, and only believe those things that can be sustained with evidence (1 Thessalonians 5:21). We should not accept what someone tells us “on faith,” because many teach lies; they should be tested to see if their claims can be backed with evidence (1 John 4:1). The truth should be searched for (Acts 17:11). It can be **known** (John 8:32). God would not expect us to believe that He is the one true God without evidence for that claim.

While there are different ways to answer the question posed by the professor, the most direct and simple answer is that **the Bible contains characteristics which humans could not have produced**. If it can be proven that a God exists and that the Bible is from God, then logically, the God of the Bible is the true God. It is truly a sad commentary on Christendom at large that the professor, as well as the many individuals that are posing such questions today, have not heard the simple answer about the nature of God’s divine Word.

After taking a moment to recover from the fact that he clearly had never experienced anyone responding rationally to his criticisms, the professor said, “Really? [pause] I’d like to see that evidence.” I pointed him to our book that summarizes the mounds of evidence that testify to the inspiration of the Bible (cf. Butt, 2007), and although he said he did not want to support our organization with a purchase, he allowed

an elder at the church that hosted the event to give it to him as a gift.

If you have not studied the divine qualities of the Bible, or are not prepared to carry on a discussion with others about the inspiration of the Bible, might I recommend to you that you secure a copy of *Behold!*



Ganesh: Hindu god of wisdom, knowledge, and new beginnings

The Word of God through our Web store **immediately**. Consider also getting the free pdf version in the “PDF-Books” section of our Web site, browsing the “Inspiration of the Bible” category on our Web site, or at the very least, order a back issue of our *Reason & Revelation* article

titled “3 Good Reasons to Believe the Bible is from God” (Butt and Lyons, 2015). Consider also those friends, loved ones, and even enemies that might benefit from a copy. The professor’s question is one of the most pivotal questions one can ask today, and the Lord’s army must be armed with the truth to be able to aid those seeking it.

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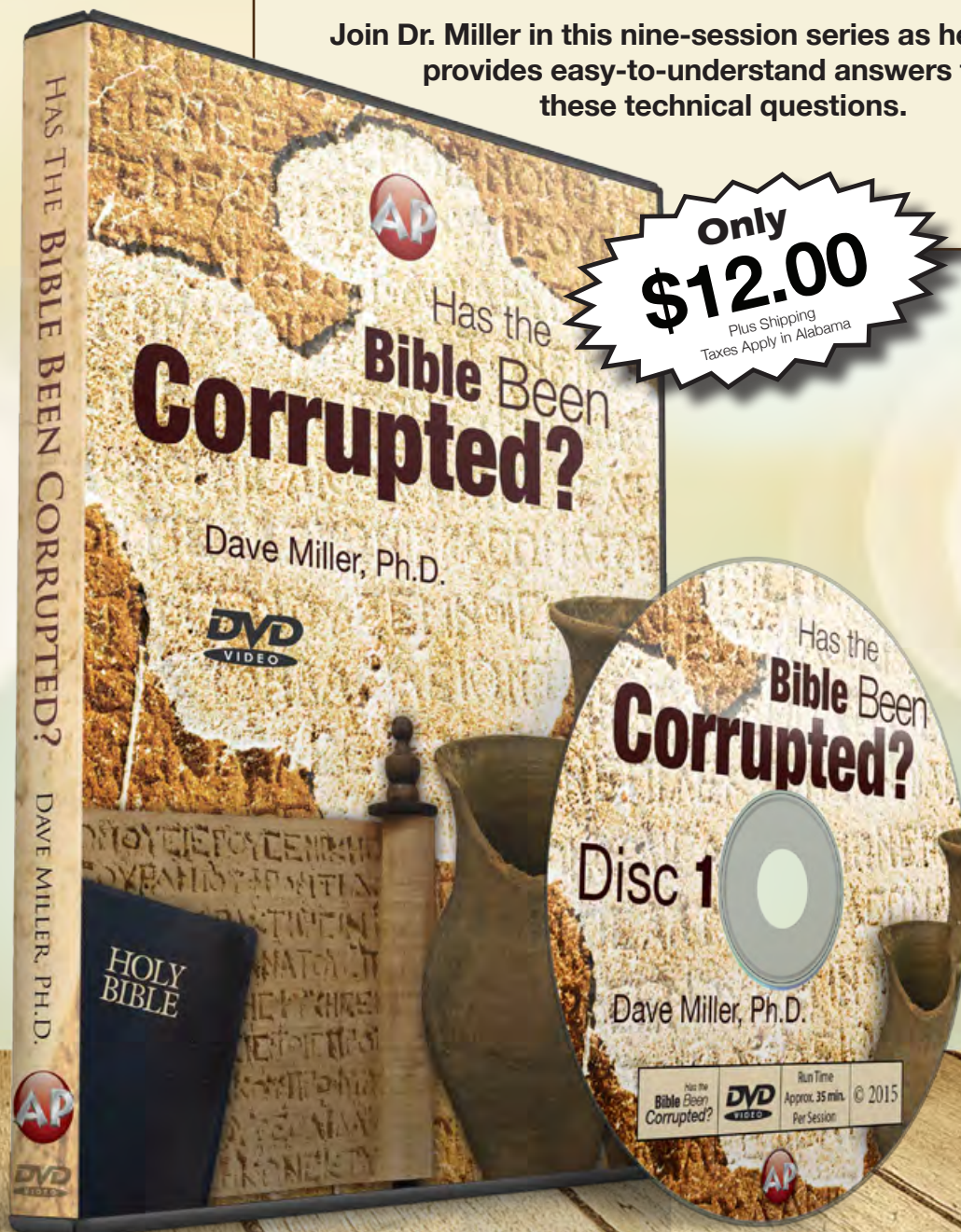
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ONE common misconception regarding the behavior of Jesus is that, on occasion, in healing the sick and performing other benevolent actions, He broke the Sabbath in order to accommodate the higher law of love. This viewpoint leaves the impression that law is sometimes, if not frequently, antithetical to being loving. It implies that sometimes breaking God's laws is necessary in order to be loving. This notion, of course, is flawed and contrary to Bible teaching. As Paul explained to the Romans: "he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments...are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:8-10). Paul meant that when you obey the law's directives concerning how to conduct yourself toward your neighbor, you will be engaging in loving behavior. To love, one must enact God's laws.

The fact is the perfect Son of God obeyed all of God's laws, never violating even one Divine precept (Hebrews 4:15). Sin is defined as violation of God's law (1 John 3:4). Since Jesus was sinless, He never broke God's laws. Hence, He could not have broken the Sabbath. Those

who leveled such an accusation against Him were, in fact, mistaken.

THE POOL

TAKE, for example, the incident in John 5, when Jesus caused a man, who suffered from a 38-year-old ailment, to rise from his bed of confinement and walk. The fact that Jesus' action took place on the Sabbath drew the criticism of the Jews who promptly informed the man, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed" (vs. 10). Many would suppose that Jesus would not be concerned with careful conformity to the Law. They would assume that He would chide the Jews for their "nit-picky, legalistic" approach to religion, and that He would be quite willing to dismiss the requirements of the Law in order to give priority to human need in the name of compassion. But this viewpoint is fraught with error, not the least of which is its demeaning assessment of law—law which God, Himself, authored. Law, according to God, is given for human well-being (Deuteronomy 6:24; 10:13; Proverbs 29:18). God's law is "holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12), and serves divinely intended, positive purposes (e.g., Romans 3:20). Indeed, Jesus' handling of His critics illustrates the high regard He had for law, the necessity of carefully conforming to

that law, and the critical importance of applying it accurately.

In John 7, calling attention to the miracle He performed in chapter 5, Jesus offered a logical rebuttal to the allegation that He violated the Sabbath. Here is that argument placed in syllogistic form:

Premise 1: If the Law of Moses requires the circumcision of a male infant on the 8th day after birth—even when the 8th day falls on the Sabbath—then healing a man on the Sabbath is equally legal.

Premise 2: The Law of Moses requires the circumcision of a male infant on the 8th day after birth—even when the 8th day fell on the Sabbath.

Conclusion: Therefore, healing a man on the Sabbath is equally legal.

Jesus then offered a concluding admonition that cinched the validity of His argument: "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (vs. 24). Making application of God's laws based on "appearance" refers to doing so based on how things seem or look to the person making the judgment, i.e., forming an opinion based on **inadequate evidence**. To the contrary, to "judge with righteous judgment" means to make accurate assessments by drawing only warranted conclusions from the evidence, i.e., thinking and acting rationally. One must be very careful that he is "accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB) and not "handling the word of God deceitfully" (2 Corinthians 4:2).

THE SYNAGOGUE

ANOTHER instance in which Jesus was falsely accused of breaking the Sabbath is seen on the occasion when Jesus entered the synagogue and encountered a man who had a deformed hand (Matthew 12:9-13). This circumstance prompted His enemies to ask Him

a question in hopes of being able to accuse Him of breaking the Law. They asked: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Of course, they had pre-decided that the answer to the question was “no,” and that, in fact, the Law would naturally forbid such an action.

Unfortunately, the prevailing interpretation of the Law of Moses at the time, at least among the Jewish leaders, was that the Sabbath law enjoined total inactivity—as if everyone was to sit down for 24 hours and **do absolutely nothing**. This view was a distortion of God’s Law on the matter. The Law gave the right, even the obligation, to engage in several activities (that could rightly be designated “work”) that did not constitute violation of the Sabbath regulation. On this occasion, Jesus pinpointed one such instance: “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?” (vs. 11). Jesus was recalling a directive from the Law of Moses:

You shall not see your brother’s ox or his sheep going astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them back to your brother. And if your brother is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until your brother seeks it; then you shall restore it to him. You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with his garment; with any lost thing of your brother’s, which he has lost and you have found, you shall do likewise; you must not hide yourself. You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again (Deuteronomy 22:1-4; cf. Exodus 23:4-5). Such passages give insight into the nature of God and provide tremen-

dous assistance in making proper application of God’s laws to everyday circumstances.

Observe that God’s laws never contradict or countermand each other. Unlike manmade laws which often manifest inconsistency and contradiction, God’s laws function in perfect harmony with each other. The Mosaic passage to which Jesus alluded demonstrates that the general principle of the cessation of usual work on the Sabbath did not conflict with any number of specific circumstances in which benevolence and compassion were to be expressed. In an agriculturally based society, a family’s survival depends on its farm animals. If a sheep, ox, or donkey were to break out of its stall, flee the premises, and then fall into a pit from which it would be unable to extricate itself, the animal would most likely die or become seriously ill if left in its predicament for 24 hours. To expend the necessary effort (i.e., “work”) to retrieve the animal from danger was not considered by God to be included in the Sabbath prohibition. Hence, Jesus stated the logical conclusion: “Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep?” (vs. 12). If action could be exerted to see to the well-being of a dumb animal, then obviously, God would approve of action taken to see to the physical care of a human being! Here, once again, is Jesus’ argument placed in syllogistic form:

Premise 1: If the Law of Moses requires a person to manifest care, concern, and physical effort to recover a neighbor’s escaped, endangered farm animal—even when the incident occurs on the Sabbath—then healing a man on the Sabbath is equally legal.

Premise 2: The Law of Moses requires a person to manifest care, concern, and physical effort to recover a neighbor’s escaped, endangered farm animal—even

when the incident occurs on the Sabbath.

Conclusion: Therefore, healing a man on the Sabbath is equally legal. The logic is penetrating and decisive. Indeed, “they could not answer Him regarding these things” (Luke 14:6; see also Luke 6:6-11). Far from suggesting that law is unimportant and may be ignored under the guise of “human need,” or implying that humans can break the “letter of the law” in order to keep the “spirit of the law” (see Miller, 2003), Jesus demonstrated that inherently built into God’s laws are all concerns deemed by Deity to be necessary. The benevolent, loving thing to do will **always** harmonize with God’s laws, since “love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10), i.e., every truly **loving** action has already been defined by God in His legal admonitions.

THE GRAIN FIELD

A **FINAL** instance in which Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath is seen in the grain field incident (Matthew 12:1-8). Many commentators automatically assume that the charge leveled against Jesus’ disciples by the Pharisees was a scripturally valid charge. However, when the disciples picked and consumed a few heads of grain from a neighbor’s field, they were doing that which was perfectly lawful (Deuteronomy 23:25). Working would have been a violation of the Sabbath law. If they had pulled out a sickle and begun harvesting the grain, they would have been violating the Sabbath law. However, they were picking strictly for the purpose of eating immediately—an action that was in complete harmony with Mosaic legislation (“but that which everyone must eat”—Exodus 12:16). A modern equivalent might be reaching for a box of cereal on the pantry shelf, pouring it in a bowl, retrieving the milk from the refrigerator, pouring it on the cereal, and eating it. The Pharisees’ charge

that the disciples were doing something “not lawful” on the Sabbath was simply an erroneous charge (cf. Matthew 15:2).

Jesus commenced to counter their accusation with masterful, penetrating logic, advancing successive rebuttals. Before He presented specific scriptural refutation of their charge, He first employed a rational device designated by logicians as *argumentum ad hominem* (literally “argument to the man”). He used the “circumstantial” form of this argument, which enabled Him to “point out a contrast between the opponent’s lifestyle and his expressed opinions, thereby suggesting that the opponent and his statements can be dismissed as **hypocritical**” (Baum, 1975, p. 470, emp. added). This variety of argumentation spotlights the opponent’s **inconsistency**, and “charges the adversary with being so prejudiced that his alleged reasons are mere rationalizations of conclusions dictated by self-interest” (Copi, 1972, p. 76).

Observe carefully the technical sophistication inherent in Jesus’ strategy. He called attention to the case of David (vss. 3-4). When David was in exile, literally running for his life to escape the jealous, irrational rage of Saul, he and his companions arrived in Nob, tired and hungry (1 Samuel 21). He lied to the priest and conned him into giving to his traveling companions the showbread, or “bread of the Presence” (12 flat cakes arranged in two rows on the table within the Tabernacle [Exodus 25:23-30; Leviticus 24:5-6])—bread that legally was reserved **only** for the priests (Leviticus 24:8-9; cf. Exodus 29:31-34; Leviticus 8:31; 22:10ff.). David clearly violated the law. Did the Pharisees condemn **him**? Absolutely not! They revered David. They held him in high regard. In fact, nearly a thousand years after his passing, his tomb was still being tended (Acts 2:29; cf. 1 Kings 2:10; Nehe-

miah 3:16; Josephus, 1974a, 13.8.4; 16.7.1; Josephus, 1974b, 1.2.5). On the one hand, they condemned the disciples of Jesus, who were **innocent**, but on the other hand, they upheld and revered David, who was **guilty**. Their inconsistency betrayed both their insincerity as well as their ineligibility to bring a charge against the disciples.

After exposing their hypocrisy and inconsistency, Jesus next turned to answer the charge pertaining to violating the Sabbath. He called their attention to the priests who worked in the Temple on the Sabbath (12:5; e.g., Numbers 28:9-10). The priests were “blameless”—**not guilty**—of violating the Sabbath law because their work was authorized to be performed on that day. As previously noted, the Sabbath law did not imply that everyone was to sit down and **do nothing**. The Law gave the right, even the obligation, to engage in several activities that did not constitute violation of the Sabbath regulation. Again, examples of such authorization included eating, Temple service, circumcision (John 7:22), tending to the basic care of animals (Exodus 23:4-5; Deuteronomy 22:1-4; Matthew 12:11; Luke 13:15), and extending kindness or assistance to the needy (Matthew 12:12; Luke 13:16; 14:1-6; John 5:5-9; 7:23). The divinely authorized Sabbath activity of the priests **proved** that the accusation of the Pharisees brought against Jesus’ disciples was false. [The term “profane” (vs. 5) is an example of the figure of speech known as metonymy of the adjunct in which “things are spoken of **according to appearance**, opinions formed respecting them, or the claims made for them” (Dungan, 1888, p. 295, emp. added). By this figure, Leah was said to be the “mother” of Joseph (Genesis 37:10), Joseph was said to be the “father” of Jesus (Luke 2:48; John 6:42), God’s preached message was said to be “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:21),

and angels were said to be “men” (e.g., Genesis 18:16; 19:10). Priestly activity on the Sabbath gave the **appearance** of violation when, in fact, it was not. Coincidentally, Bullinger classified the allusion to “profane” in this verse as an instance of *catachresis*, or incongruity, stating that “it expresses what was true according to the **mistaken notion** of the Pharisees as to manual works performed on the Sabbath” (1898, p. 676, emp. added).]

After pointing out the obvious legality of priestly effort expended on the Sabbath, Jesus stated: “But I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple” (12:6). The underlying Greek text actually has “something” instead of “One.” If priests could carry on Tabernacle/Temple service on the Sabbath, surely Jesus’ own disciples were authorized to engage in service in the presence of the Son of God! After all, service directed to the person of Jesus certainly is greater than the pre-Christianity Temple service conducted by Old Testament priests.

For all practical purposes, the discussion was over. Jesus had disproved the claim of the Pharisees. But He did not stop there. He took His methodical confrontation to yet another level. He penetrated beneath the surface argument that the Pharisees had posited and focused on their **hearts**: “But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless” (12:7). In this verse, Jesus quoted from an Old Testament context (Hosea 6:6) in which the prophet of old struck a blow against the mere external, superficial, ritualistic observance of some laws, to the neglect of heartfelt, sincere, humble attention to other laws while treating people properly. The comparison is evident. The Pharisees who confronted Jesus’ disciples were not truly interested in obeying God’s law. They were masquerad-

ing under that **pretense** (cf. Matthew 15:1-9; 23:3). But their problem did not lie in an attitude of desiring careful compliance with God's law. Rather, their zest for law keeping was **hypocritical** and unaccompanied by their own obedience and concern for others. They possessed critical hearts and were more concerned with scrutinizing and blasting people than with honest, genuine applications of God's directives for the good of mankind.

They had neutralized the true intent of divine regulations, making void the Word of God (Matthew 15:6). They had ignored and skipped over the significant laws that enjoined justice, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23). Consequently, though their attention to legal detail was laudable, their **misapplication** of it, as well as **their own neglect and rejection** of some aspects of it, made them inappropriate and unqualified promulgators of God's laws. Indeed, they simply did not fathom the teaching of Hosea 6:6 (cf. Micah 6:6-8). "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" is a Hebraism (cf. Matthew 9:13) [McGarvey, 1875, pp. 82-83]. God was not saying that He did not want sacrifices offered under the Old Testament economy (notice the use of "more" in Hosea 6:6). Rather, He was saying that He did not want sacrifice **alone**. He wanted mercy **with** sacrifice. Internal motive and attitude are **just as important** to God as the external compliance with specifics.

Samuel addressed this same attitude shown by Saul: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). Samuel was not minimizing the essentiality of sacrifice as required by God. Rather, he was convicting Saul of the pretense of using one aspect of God's requirements, i.e., alleged "sacrifice" of the best animals (1 Samuel

15:15), as a smoke screen for violating God's instructions, i.e., failing to **destroy** all the animals (1 Samuel 15:3). If the Pharisees had understood these things, they would not have accused the disciples of breaking the law when the disciples, in fact, had not done so. They "would not have condemned the **guiltless**" (Matthew 12:7, emp. added).

While the disciples **were** guilty of violating an injunction that the Pharisees had **concocted** (supposing the injunction to be a genuine implication of the Sabbath regulation), the disciples were **not guilty** of a violation of Sabbath law. The Pharisees' propensity for enjoining their uninspired and erroneous interpretations of Sabbath law upon others was the direct result of cold, unmerciful hearts that found a kind of sadistic glee in binding burdens upon people for burdens' sake rather than in encouraging people to obey God genuinely.

Jesus placed closure on His exchange with the Pharisees on this occasion by asserting the accuracy of His handling of this entire affair: "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (vs. 8). In other words, Jesus affirmed His deity and, therefore, His credentials and authoritative credibility for making accurate application of the Law of Moses to the issue at hand. One can trust Jesus' exegesis and application of Sabbath law; after all, He wrote it!

Matthew 12 does **not** teach that Jesus broke the Sabbath or sanctions occasional violation of His laws under extenuating circumstances. His laws are **never** optional, relative, or situational—even though people often find God's will inconvenient and difficult (e.g., John 6:60; Matthew 11:6; 15:12; 19:22; Mark 6:3; 1 Corinthians 1:23). The truth of the matter is that **if the heart is receptive** to God's will, His will is "easy" (Matthew 11:30), "not too

hard" (Deuteronomy 30:11), nor "burdensome" (1 John 5:3). If, on the other hand, the heart resists His will and does not desire to conform to it, then God's words are "offensive" (Matthew 15:12), "hard," (John 6:60), "narrow" (Matthew 7:14), and like a hammer that breaks in pieces and grinds the resister into powder (Jeremiah 23:29; Matthew 21:44).

CONCLUSION

THE religion of Christ surpasses all human religion. It is rooted in the very essence of Deity. When Jesus took on human form on Earth, He showed Himself to be the Master logician and exegete Who always conducted Himself in a rational manner and conformed His actions to divine law. May we do likewise.

[NOTE: For more on Jesus' handling of the Sabbath, see Miller, 2004.]

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NOTE FROM

The Editor



New DVD: *Has the Bible Been Corrupted?*

How often have you heard people say the following?

“You can’t be sure you have the Bible in its original form.”

“The Bible developed lots of errors and mistakes while it was being transmitted over the centuries.”

“The existing manuscript copies of the Bible all differ with each other and have thousands of variant wordings.”

Sadly, we are living at a point in American history in which skeptics, atheists, and modernists have waged an aggressive war against the Bible for over a century. Muslims and Mormons also believe the Bible has been corrupted in transmission. They have been significantly successful in undermining public confidence in the authenticity of the text of the Bible. They have particularly eroded the faith of young people who attend state universities. Young people walk away from their college education entertaining serious doubts about the Bible—if not outright loss of confidence in the credibility of Scripture.

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- How much manuscript evidence do we have for the Bible?
- Do we have the original autograph copies of the Bible?
- How can we be sure we have the Bible as God intended it?
- How do we know how the original Bible read?

- Is Mark 16:9-20 supposed to be in the Bible?

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Dave Miller

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